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Niezwyłka Podroz Balthazara Kobera

(The Tribulations
Of Balthazar Kobera)
(POLISH-FRENCH)

Variety — 9-7-88
A Film Polski (Warsaw)/Jock Film/La Sept (Paris) coproduction. Directed by Wojciech J. Has. Screenplay, Has, from the novel by Frederick Tristan; camera (Agfacolor), Grzegorz Kedzierski; editor, Wanda Zeman; music, Zdzislaw Szostak; production design, Wojciech Jaworski, Albina Baranska; sound, Janusz Rosol; costumes, Magdalena Biernawska, Maria Nowotny; production managers, Pawel Rakowski, Jean Lefevre. Reviewed at Venice Film Festival (competing), Aug. 29, 1988. Running time: 115 MIN.

Balthazar Kober Rafal Wieczynski
Cammerschulze Michaël Lonsdale
Rosa Adrianna Biedrzynska
Gertrud Gabriela Kownacka
Mother Emmanuele Riva
Rector Daniel Emilfork

■ **Venice — The dreamlike odyssey of a young man across plague-ridden 16th century Germany yields a pic that's often extremely beautiful, but it's too remote and lethargic to command full audience attention. It looms as an elegant failure.**

Director Wojciech J. Has is best known for "The Saragossa Manuscript" (1965), and there are occasional elements of that haunting pic in this stolid adaptation of a novel by French author Frederick Tristan. Central character is a visionary youth, the eponymous Balthazar, an orphan with a vivid imagination. He can conjure up an image of the angel Gabriel, complete with wings and sword, who shows him how to walk through fire; he also can "see" his dead parents and other visions of heaven and hell.

Despite all this, Balthazar finds it hard to communicate because of a severe stutter. Nevertheless, he's taken in hand by a wise man (played with style by Michaël Lonsdale) who philosophizes about God and Knowledge.

As the teenage hero, Rafal Wieczynski gives a monotonous performance. More interesting is Emmanuele Riva, briefly seen as his long-dead mother. There are reminders here of "The Seventh Seal," via the plague-ridden landscape across which the hero wanders, and the dreamlike visions. "Tribulations" is a much softer film, and great patience is demanded of audiences during this overlong journey.

Most disappointingly, the magic to be found in "The Saragossa Manuscript" and in another famous Has film, "The Sandglass" (1973), is largely absent here; attempts at humor are only fitfully successful.

Outside of Polish film weeks, international chances look to be very difficult.—*Strat.*